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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ONE IRAQI HOPES FOR WAR WHILE JORDANIANS PROTEST AGAINST IT

REF: AMMAN 745

The following cable, which describes a recent encounter with an Iraqi resident in Jordan, was drafted by an Embassy Amman FSN.

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: During the weekend of January 31, which saw a large Jordanian anti-war protest (ref), political FSN spoke at length with a middle aged Iraqi woman, who fumed about the hypocrisy of her Arab brethren and hoped that war would soon sweep away Saddam and the misery besetting her people. END SUMMARY

¶12. (SBU) The Jordanian street's view of potential military action in Iraq is unquestionably negative. Many see it, along with the war on terrorism, as part of a broader campaign against Islam and the Muslim world. Many even accord Saddam Hussein "esteem" as the only Arab who stands against "Western Hegemony". Jordanians overwhelmingly believe that war will be bad for the Iraqi (and Jordanian) people, and want their Iraqi brethren to know they are "on their side".

IRAQI IRONY: THE FLIP SIDE

¶13. (SBU) On January 29, PolFSN spoke to a middle-aged Iraqi woman resident in Jordan, who recently returned from a 17-day visit to Baghdad. "The Iraqi people are waiting for this war because they are sick of their lives, sick of Saddam, and the injustice and fear they live with," she said. "He (Saddam) has brought us nothing but pain and we want a change -- even if Sharon comes to rule us it would be better than Saddam."

¶14. (SBU) "Iraqis are angry at the rest of the Arab world for protesting the presumed war" and are especially indignant toward the Palestinians. They resent the fact that Saddam gives so much money away to Palestinian martyr families while leaving his own people starving. "The young have gray hair from the injustice and fear they live in, no one can talk because every one man has two intelligence (men) walking behind him."

¶15. (SBU) On day-to-day life in Baghdad, she said people live very simply, with money for only the bare necessities. The streets are empty, and people sit indoors to listen to their radios, since everything on TV "is about Saddam." Most are convinced war is imminent. The Iraqi woman said that the stores are relatively well stocked, but most Iraqis can't afford to buy.

¶16. (SBU) She then described an assortment of unpleasantness about Iraqi life, e.g. how her niece was offered a scholarship and how Saddam's people "stole it" and gave it to their own people, and how this kind of thing happens all the time. She talked about Saddam's tanks being situated strategically in front of mosques. She talked about how lavish Saddam's palaces are, and how the rest of the population struggles to put food on the table. "Doesn't the Arab world understand that we are sick of Saddam? Even if war is bad, people cannot go on as is... something has to change."

¶17. (SBU) COMMENT. Our FSN's contact is a former schoolteacher in Baghdad and is now working as an in-home manicurist in Amman to make ends meet. We do not know what percentage of Iraqis share her views, but her opinions were strong enough to make an impression and merit reporting. The sentiment she expressed was that while no one wants war, many Iraqis see this potential war as their only way out of an intolerable situation.

GNEHM